

SAVING SOCIAL SECURITY • DOWN ON THE CORPORATE FARM

# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

March 7, 1999

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# IN THESE TIMES

## 1999

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We're calling our effort the Appeal to Reason Campaign, following in the footsteps of that legendary weekly newspaper published at the turn of the century in Girard, Kansas. The *Appeal to Reason* reached 750,000 subscribers in its heyday with the help of committed readers, an "Appeal Army" that spread word about the newspaper. Our immediate goal is, in comparison, a modest one: With your support, we aim to triple our readership over the next three years.

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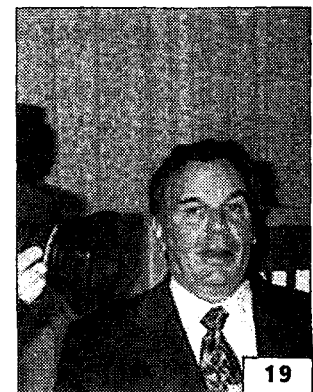
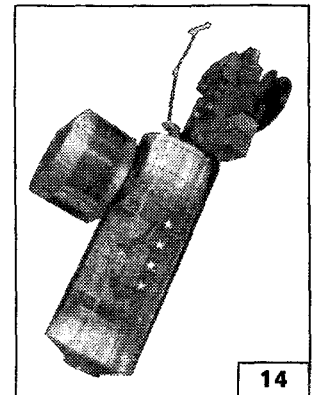
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# Letters

## Feeling Queasy

Your editorial on American self-righteousness and the futility of beating the nearly dead Iraqi horse was much appreciated for the historical and regional context it provided ("Super Powerless," Jan. 10). But further developments beg an additional point be made to the many claiming that Clinton timed the bombings to divert attention from the impeachment proceedings. They've got it all backward. The massive attacks quickly became a secondary news item, a barely annoying distraction from the "historic" soap opera playing out in Congress.

Americans have received another painless inoculation against the natural revulsion toward war. The military can distribute more medals and promotions. The Pentagon's relentless procurement machine has had its pipes cleaned out and can continue funneling public wealth to arms dealers. The manufacturers have had a great sales demo. Though we occasionally gag in our bacchanalian binge of weapons consumption, we have now certified Iraq as our national vomitorium.

Tom Stewart  
Albuquerque, N.M.

## No Joke

Henry Perril's letter assailing both Terry LaBan's cartoon and this magazine for being intolerably anti-Semitic is utterly without merit (Jan. 10). In fact, *The Jerusalem Report*—a magazine not known for its anti-Zionism or anti-Semitism—reported that Israeli security

is concerned that far-right Jewish fundamentalists opposed to any peaceful co-existence with the Palestinians have suggested that Netanyahu—a right-wing extremist himself—may be targeted for assassination. Yes, there are nut-case Jewish terrorists.

David Eugene Blank  
Louisville, Ky.

## Wrong Way

David Dyssegaard Kallick has tried once more to differentiate his "third way" from the politics of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair ("Dialogue," Jan. 10). For him, the "third way" takes material form in "civil society." If there is any slogan more empty of content and more easily abused by demagogues than "third way," it is "civil society." Let's try and give them both a more specific content.

Tony Blair's experiment in a "third way" can be defined very precisely. Through all his gyrations one thing has been consistent. His program requires the elimination of that particular organization of "civil society" known as the British Labour Party. It is being replaced by a bureaucratic electoral machine. Clinton's job was much easier. The Democratic Party never had an organized membership or a representative structure. It always has been a patronage machine based on elected officials and their staffs, who are themselves apprentice office seekers.

Kallick pays no attention to this phenomenon. The concept of a representative mass party does not

appear in his scheme. His alternative to liberalism's reliance on "big government" is the small, local group of volunteer activists who usually represent no one other than themselves. No matter how valid their claims or how real their dedication, neither "big government" nor "big business" has to take them seriously.

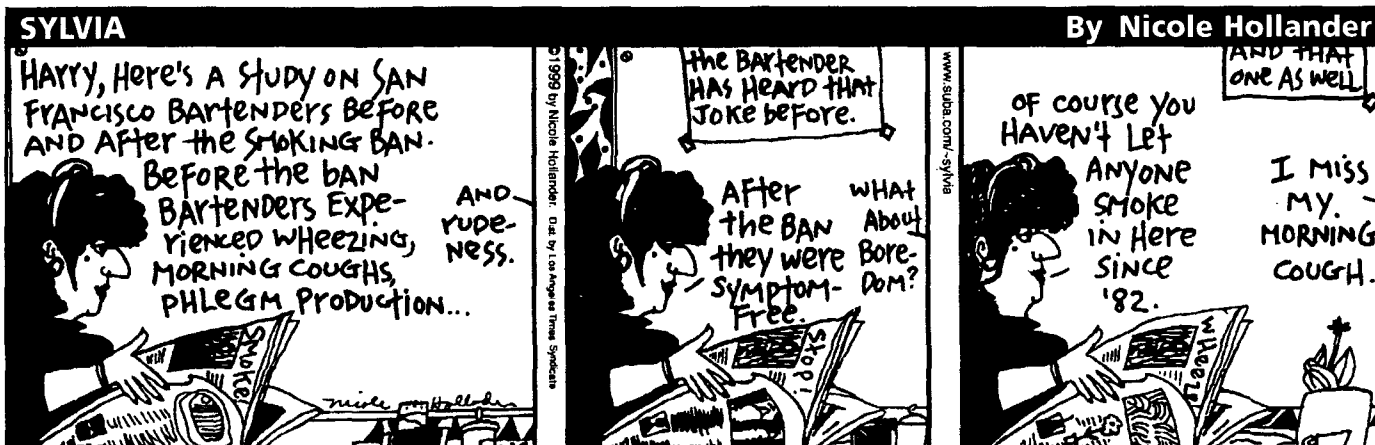
The American left has tried to dodge the question of political power for close to 40 years, hiding behind vague phrases like "participatory democracy," "community organizing" and "civil society." The slogan describing Kallick's politics is "thinking globally, acting locally." The result has been "getting screwed royally."

I suggest that is why we on the left have less influence on the government—and on the American people—than at any time in the history of the country. Kallick, it seems to me, is simply making a virtue out of our weakness and calling it a "third way."

E. Haberkern  
Berkeley, Calif.

## Newsroom News

Publisher Paul Obis resigned on Jan. 1. His position has been filled by associate publisher Sonya Huber and former assistant publisher Claudia Morris, who will serve as co-publishers. Welcome back, Claudia. So long, Paul, it's been good to know you.



# Paradise Lost

**W**hen it comes to obstructing justice and covering up a sex scandal, Tom DeLay, the Republican majority whip from Texas, makes Bill Clinton look little league.

While the president spent the beginning of this year on trial in the Senate, DeLay, the new kingmaker of the 106th Congress, sat untouched and unchallenged for his own shenanigans. Call it a matter of location.

Clinton, after all, performed his infamous Lewinsky capers in the Oval Office, a stone's throw from half of the Washington press corps. DeLay pulled off his most scurvy work in an American outpost half a world away. The place is called the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). It is a U.S. territory of 70,000 inhabitants on 14 tiny islands more than 3,500 miles west of Hawaii; a tropical paradise whose most well-known spot is the island of Saipan.

The Northern Marianas is one of those dark secrets of corporate America. It is a virtual slave labor camp on U.S. soil, producing more than \$1 billion in garments annually for some of this country's most famous apparel makers, companies like The Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, J.C. Penney, Sears, Dayton-Hudson and The Limited. Thousands of immigrants from China, the Philippines, India and Bangladesh have been lured to work in nearly 30 garment factories there. The factories are owned mostly by Hong Kong, Taiwanese and South Korean businessmen; some are even owned by the Chinese government.

Unlike other U.S. territories, federal minimum-wage laws don't apply in the Northern Marianas, so the workers make only \$3 an hour. But everything they produce is labeled "Made in the USA" and exempt from U.S. import duties.

The workers are forced to live in squalid barracks ringed by barbed wire. They are held as indentured servants of the predatory labor agents who recruited them. A U.S. Interior Department investigation reported that problems of foreign contract workers in the CNMI "include fraudulent recruitment prac-

tices, substandard living conditions, severe malnutrition and health problems, and unprovoked acts of violence." "Water is turned on for only 15 minutes per day for bathing and house cleaning," one inspector reported. "At this time workers will fill



buckets for use later either flushing toilets or cleaning. Some workers are not provided drinking water at their barracks and must fill bottles at the factory to bring back with them."

Many of the thousands of Asian women lured to the CNMI have been forced into prostitution for the tourist industry to pay off the huge fees they owe the labor contractors. In a 1998 report on labor conditions there, California Rep. George Miller, the ranking Democrat on the House Resources Committee, interviewed several Chinese women brought to Saipan as legitimate laborers, who were then forced to provide sex to karaoke bar patrons. "They were told that if they refused," Miller wrote, "then they would be beaten or deported."

So many immigrants have been brought to the islands that the original Chamorro inhabitants, all of them U.S. citizens, now comprise only 40 percent of the population. Despite all of the industrial growth, more than 90 percent of private jobs are held by immigrants who have no legal rights. The U.S. citizen residents either work for the government, which pays far higher wages than the factories, or they survive on unemployment or welfare.

Of course, DeLay's cowboy constituents couldn't give a hoot about the Northern Marianas. But that hasn't

stopped him or his staff from making repeated trips to golf and snorkel there—all at the expense of the CNMI government. Nor did it stop DeLay from taking thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from Jack Abramoff, a member of the lobbying firm Preston Gates, Ellis & Rouvelas Meeds, which represents the CNMI government in Washington. In fact, one of DeLay's top aides, Bill Jarrel, went to work for the firm around the time the Clinton administration began investigating labor abuses in the territory.

Other top House Republicans, like Majority Leader Dick Armey, and their staffers have traveled there on all-expense-paid junkets arranged by Abramoff and the lobbying firm. In turn, Abramoff and his family members have contributed \$18,000 to DeLay's campaign or political action committee since 1996, and thousands more to the coffers of other top Republicans.

**DeLay pulled off his most scurvy work in an American outpost half a world away.**

Meanwhile, Miller and the Clinton administration have been trying to pass legislation that would at least require factory owners to pay the federal minimum wage and the local government to clamp down on the illegal labor smuggling. But Abramoff's lobbying has been so successful that Republicans have refused even to allow a hearing on Miller's bill.

The Marianas scandal briefly made it into the news in January after labor and human rights advocates filed \$1 billion dollar class-action lawsuits in both California state and federal courts and in CNMI territorial court against the giant U.S. retailers doing business there.

Like the Lewinsky affair, this scandal features the exploitation of innocent employees, unseemly sex, violations of federal law and a cover-up by powerful Washington politicians. Where is Kenneth Starr when you need him? ■

# SAVING SOCIAL SECURITY *(from its saviors)*

By David Dyssegaard Kallick

**F**irst and above all, we must save Social Security for the 21st century," President Clinton proclaimed in his State of the Union address.

Yet, as it has shaped up so far, the Social Security debate has been constructed around misleading ideas. Here's the truth: Social Security is not in grave danger. The real debate is not about funding, but about a fundamental change in how we think about a cornerstone New Deal program.

"The retirement program is actuarially bankrupt," huffs a recent Heritage Foundation briefing paper, citing the 1998 Social Security Trustees Report as its source. The accompanying chart looks like the tailstream of a crashing jet. The Social Security "deficit" hums along in a flat, even line for the first two decades of the next century, then swoops heart-stoppingly downward for 50 years until it smacks into the bottom of the chart at \$7 trillion below zero in 2075. Relax. This is a lot of hyperbole for a minor problem.

Here's what's going on: Social Security was designed to be a "pay-as-you-go" system. Social Security taxes aren't set aside to pay for your retirement; they pay for your parents' retirement. It was a brilliant Depression-era scheme that lifted millions of elderly people out of abject poverty. But three practical glitches have come up in this system: the Baby Boom generation, increased life expectancy and decreasing birth rates. Because more people were born between 1945 and 1964 than in following years, there are proportionately more people in the work force today—and there will be proportionately more retirees in 2010. And because life expectancy continues to increase, people are living and drawing Social Security benefits longer.

Due to a boomer work force, there is now an \$800-billion surplus in Social Security funds, all of which is invested in Treasury bonds. But barring an increase in birth rates (another boom generation) or immigration (a straight policy decision), when boomers begin to retire there will be a higher ratio of retirees to workers. At some point, the surplus will be cashed out, and the Social Security trustees estimate that the future work force will be able to cover only 75 percent of benefits.

This—not total bankruptcy—is the issue. The trustees cur-

rently estimate a shortfall in our ability to pay benefits in 2032. However, there is a lot of leeway in this projection. In fact, as Ron Gebhardtsbauer, senior pension fellow of the American Academy of Actuaries, points out, "The trustees actually make three projections, all of them using very reasonable assumptions."

The middle projection is the one we hear about. But this year's low-cost projection says there will be no problem in the Social Security system ever; the high-cost projection says the crunch will come in 2022. Small differences in any number of factors—birth rates, life expectancy, immigration, economic growth, productivity growth, unemployment rates, inflation rates—would make a big difference over such a long period of time. A 1 percent point difference in wage growth, for example, would push back the shortfall for 14 years.

In addition, some of the trustees' assumptions are contradictory. For example, as Dean Baker wrote last summer in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the trustees assume "that there will be no increase in immigration even when the economy experiences a labor shortage because of the retirement of the Baby Boom generation; and that this labor shortage will not lead to a rapid growth in wages."

So as it turns out—Clinton fans will be pleased to learn—whether the Social Security system "is actuarially bankrupt" depends on what your definition of the word "is" is. Why would a cohort of politicians who can't think past the next poll, much less the next election, try to tackle the problems of 2032?

The proposed solutions provide a clue about the ideological stakes fueling this debate. Notably out of the picture is a straight increase in funding allocated to the Social Security Trust. Instead, the manufactured "crisis atmosphere" is being used to expand the political ground for two big ideas: privatization and "market magic."

**T**he central principle of privatization—the idea widely favored on the Republican side of the aisle—is to transform Social Security from a program in which current workers collectively pay for current retirees (with some put aside to cover boomers) into one in which current workers put aside money individually for their own retirement.



Privatization has certain benefits—choice and capital accumulation, for example. But let's face it: We already have an overwhelmingly privatized retirement system. About half of workers today have some other form of pension or retirement fund.

What's wrong with fully privatizing our retirement system? A lot. First of all, if individuals take charge of investing their entire nest egg, some will inevitably wind up with much of it splattered on the floor. When the stock market dips—as it periodically will—the downturn will plunge millions of retirees into poverty. Will we “rescue” them from misplaced bets, as we do trillion-dollar hedge funds? If not, unpleasant numbers of seniors whose main shortcoming is lack of market savvy will be living on the street in cardboard boxes. If so, we just reinvent the current system.

Privatization also breeds economic polarization. The current Social Security system reduces the wealth gap: It benefits low-income people proportionally more than high-income. Privatized accounts will eliminate progressivity and introduce regressivity, since people with more disposable income can

take greater advantage of any tax advantages or matching funds. Furthermore, any system in which a single pot of money—your IRA—replaces regular monthly payments for life will hurt groups that have a longer life expectancy (women, whites), spend more time out of the work force (women, the unemployed, immigrants) or earn less (women, people of color).

Then there are the crucial transition and administrative costs, which are understated by the advocates of privatization. Social Security is a tremendously efficient system. Setting up individual accounts introduces added fees to brokerage firms, funds managers and lawyers (who are all standing on the sidelines of this debate salivating as quietly as they can). Administrative costs in some estimates run so high they make individual accounts absurd.

From the political point of view, what may be more important than all of the above is that privatization undermines social cohesion. For more than 60 years, we have shared a belief that today's working people have a responsibility to ensure senior citizens a decent standard of living. Yet the scare that Social Security “won't be there” is very real. Although post-boomers and Gen-Xers are wrong to think that the fund will be bankrupt, they're right to sense a wavering of the political will to pay. What was once considered a rock-solid government commitment sounds to a generation

## Seven Things Everyone Should Know About Social Security

By Mark Weisbrot

**T**here were sighs of relief all over Washington when President Clinton announced his Social Security plan during his State of the Union address. It could have been much worse.

Most of the plans that have been put forth by think tanks or members of Congress have called either for some form of privatization or benefit cuts—or both. The president's plan did neither of these things and had one positive element: He would commit \$2.7 billion in projected budget surpluses over the next 15 years to the Social Security Trust Fund. But privatization remains a real and present danger.

The president also proposed investing about \$700 billion of the fund's assets in the stock market. Congressional Republicans probably won't swallow this part, but they may respond with a proposal to put the money in individual accounts. The diversion of Social Security taxes into individual accounts would seriously undermine the guaranteed benefits and stability that Social Security has provided for America's elderly, while creating enormous administrative waste. And the fact that Clinton also proposed creating individual accounts—not funded out of Social Security revenues—increases the chances of such a compromise.

Lost in the debate over Social Security are the most basic facts about the program. As long as the whole discussion of reform is based on fundamentally false premises, Social Security will remain vulnerable to political attacks carried out under the guise of “saving” the system. In fact, Social Security needs only to be saved from its would-be rescuers.

Here's what everyone should know:

**1 Social Security is financially sound.** According to the best estimates of the program's actuaries, it will pay all promised benefits for the next 33 years, without any adjustments. These projections are not disputed by those who want to “reform the system.” In fact, they are conservative estimates based on the assumption that the economy will grow at the modest annual rate of 1.5 percent over the next 75 years—less than half the rate of growth over the past 75 years.

**2 The world won't end in 2032.** Even if nothing is done to increase its revenue, the system would still have enough money in 2032 to pay—indeinitely—an average real (inflation adjusted) benefit higher than that of today. The benefit in 2032 would only be about three-fourths of what retirees have been promised; but since promised benefits rise every year (even after adjusting for inflation), this is still higher than what retirees receive now. Of course, this is a highly pessimistic scenario and, over the next 34 years, the system could easily be adjusted so that all promised benefits are paid. In fact, the tax increase of less than 1 percent of national income necessary to balance the program for the next 75 years would be less than the Social Security payroll tax increases that were implemented in the '50s, '60s or '80s.

**3 The privatizers' numbers don't add up.** Proposals to improve Social Security's finances by investing the program's surplus in the stock market assume a 7 percent rate of return on equities, which is inconsistent with their projected economic growth rates. There is no way →



that grew up in the Reagan years like little more than a promise for future administrations to help out if they can.

Even privatizers seem to have a certain amount of anxiety about social cohesion. Why else would a Cato Institute booklet advocating privatization be called, paradoxically, "Common Cents, Common Dreams"? Cato's Web site gets more directly to the privatizers' point: "Click below to calculate what you stand to gain under a privatized Social Security system." Look out for number one, it beckons.

How does society change when we abandon an intergenerational social contract for naked individualism? Consider that Social Security is arguably the one anti-poverty program that really works. Without Social Security, half of all senior citizens would have incomes below the poverty line. If cutting school budgets to give tax breaks to the wealthy is an "eat-your-children" social policy, one might call Social Security privatization an "eat-your-parents" plan.

**T**he big story of the Clinton plan is that the president didn't go down the route to privatization, despite flirting with it for some time. Yet, while Clinton and the Republicans differ about privatization, they essentially agree that the system can be "saved" by the stock market. The

president's preferred form of "market magic" is to transfer a portion of the budget surplus to the Social Security Trust and invest it in equities.

Conservatives object because they are afraid the government will exert influence over the stock market. Yet what's worst about the government becoming America's largest single stockholder is not that it will "meddle" in the market, but that it won't. A central social hazard of the stock market—or, more accurately, with large stock portfolios managed on behalf of others—is that the "fiduciary responsibility" of funds managers requires them not to consider anything but maximizing the financial return on investment. It doesn't matter whether workers might stand to gain more from wage increases held back by the stock market than an additional 1 percent increase in the value of their pension fund.

The undue priority given to stock prices is a concern that worries even the likes of George Soros, who (having pocketed billions from the financial markets) fears that the imperatives of speculative capital are encroaching on the rest of society and distorting long-term economic priorities. As a society, we should be encouraging companies that make a profit while providing good jobs, being ahead of the environmental curve and becoming integrated in livable

to reconcile this contradiction: It is impossible to have this rate of return on stocks (which we've seen over the last 75 years), if the economy grows half as fast. If the economy were to grow fast enough to provide a 7 percent annual rate of return on equities, the Social Security Trust Fund would accumulate an enormous surplus over the entire planning period—without investing any of it in the stock market.

**4 Private accounts would cost too much.** Privatizing Social Security through the creation of individual accounts cannot increase the return that retirees receive over the next 75 years, as compared to simply maintaining the current system. The costs of "transition" to a privatized system alone would make this impossible. Current payroll tax revenues are paying for the checks of current beneficiaries. Any diversion of tax revenues into private accounts, even a partial one, would require a tax increase to pay current benefits until the new individual accounts accumulate enough assets to provide retirement income, which would take at least 40 years. Additional taxes to pay for such a transition earn zero return for employees. These taxes could be spread out over a longer period through borrowing—in some plans it is up to 75 years—but this simply would cause more generations to get a lower return from their Social Security taxes than they would under the present system. The return gets even worse if we take into account the enormous administrative costs of individual accounts, which could be 10 to 15 times as much as under the current system.

**5 Social Security is the nation's most successful anti-poverty program.** Privatization plans call for cuts that would push millions of senior citizens below the poverty line. The official poverty rate for America's elderly is about 11 percent—without Social Security, it would be close to 50 percent. The program provides the major source of income

for two-thirds of the elderly population. Social Security also provides more than \$12 trillion worth of life insurance—more than the entire private life insurance industry. For a typical wage earner with a spouse and two children, this life insurance is equivalent to a policy worth about \$300,000, in addition to retirement benefits. The disability insurance provided by the program is equivalent to a \$200,000 policy on top of that.

**6 Raising the retirement age punishes African-Americans.** Based on average life expectancy, a typical black male worker who is 39 years old today can anticipate about 2.3 years of full retirement benefits. A white male of the same cohort can expect 8.4 years. Therefore, raising the retirement age would take tremendously more away from African-American male workers than white male workers. And since differences in life expectancy by income, occupation and education are about as large as the differences by race, raising the retirement age also would hurt low-income workers much more than higher-income groups.

**It's not the boomers' fault.** The Baby Boom generation already will have retired by 2032, when the system is projected to run short of money. The youngest baby boomers will be 68, the oldest 86. They won't strain the system's finances while they are retiring, because their retirement already has been taken into account; both payroll taxes and the retirement age were raised in 1983, assuring that the program would generate enough revenue to pay for the retirement of this large age group. In fact, the projected strain on the system is primarily a result of people living longer. ■

**Mark Weisbrot** is research director at the Preamble Center in Washington. He is co-author, with Dean Baker, of *Social Security: The Phony Crisis* (University of Chicago Press).



communities. Instead, Clinton happily promises that if the federal government owned stock, it would not pick stocks based on anything other than maximizing profit. What sort of political message is this?

Not long ago, farmers, small business owners and factory workers had a deeply ingrained knowledge of how Wall Street's logic was at odds with the common good. Populism's "message," as it would be called today, resonated with the public because everyone understood the inverse relationship between stock prices on the one hand and wages or the availability of credit on the other. Today, when just less than 50 percent of Americans hold stocks in some form or another, wages are still important, but when the stock market goes up ... well, that's good, too.

Of course, some players hold a lot more stock than others, and half the population is left entirely out of the game. In recent years, Wall Street has been America's most powerful wealth polarizer. Investing Social Security in the stock market will be accompanied by a loud sucking noise—the sound of the last big chunk of available capital being siphoned into the financial markets.

Still, some parts of Clinton's plan deserve praise. First and foremost, the president seems to have swept off the table—at least for the time being—proposals to reduce benefits and raise the age of eligibility. And, although taking Social Security funds and putting them into the stock market is a bad idea, taking money from the budget surplus and using it to guarantee the government's commitment to Social Security is a very good one.

**T**he Social Security debate presents an opportunity. It's rare for a serious long-term political issue to be prominent in the public debate. If we need to increase the amount of money in the system—as we probably will—let's begin by doing those things that make sense anyway.

Enhancing the long-term strength of the economy is the single best way to strengthen the Social Security fund. Gains in productivity, for example, would allow future generations to expand growth even with a smaller work force. We can enhance productivity by investing in things central to sustainable long-term growth: infrastructure, education and environmental efficiency.

While the benefits of Social Security are progressive, the FICA tax that funds them—the 1 percent taken out of your payroll each month—is a regressive "flat tax." Worse still, FICA (like Social Security benefits) is applicable only to the first \$68,000 of income. Eliminating that cap altogether would be a drastic step that might encourage evasion and spark an uproar, but raising it even just to \$100,000 would solve roughly a quarter of the projected shortfall. Increasing FICA taxes is an unappealing option, but taxing benefits is a logical step. It would solve another 14 percent of the problem and—

while hurting middle-income families—it would not affect the lowest wage earners who do not pay taxes.

For no good reason, some state and local government employees are currently outside of the Social Security system. Extending coverage to them—as proposed by New York Sen. Patrick Moynihan—would solve another 10 percent of the problem. Adding this to the money Clinton proposes to take from the budget surplus, even without investing it in the stock market, eliminates the "crisis."

But let's not stop there. Let's keep on our list ways to improve benefits—even if they increase costs. It makes sense to revamp the system by which wages earned after the retirement age are counted or to lower the age when benefits are collected, giving a fairer shake to African-American men, who have a considerably lower life expectancy than the general population. (Few people are aware that *beginning next year* Social Security eligibility is scheduled to begin a long, slow rise from 65 to 67 by the year 2022.)

At the same time, let's use this debate not just to win reform of Social Security—which, indeed, needs only very modest adjustments—but to further a different set of principles and values than "market magic." Social Security is a model universal program that guarantees a minimum standard for all while leaving plenty of room on top of that for individual and family responsibility. It promotes social cohesion while allowing individual choice. It is efficient, effective and popular. If we can't win this one, what can we win? ■

David Dyssegaard Kallick is a senior fellow of the Preamble Center (<http://www.preamble.org>).

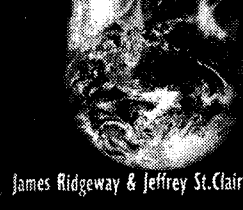
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**GARBAGE** in your backyard or on your doorstep?

How would you feel about somebody **POISONING** your air  
and water or **CONTAMINATING** the food that you and  
your children eat?

Believe it or not, American industry is guilty of all this  
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protecting us from these abuses has been lending a hand.

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# PHANTOM MENACE

## THE PENTAGON BUDGET SHOOTS FOR THE STARS

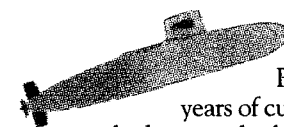
BY IRA SHORR

Washington is a city grounded in sex and power, so it's no surprise that when it comes to Monica and the military, President Bill Clinton is a guy who just can't say no.

The president took time from his impeachment travails to announce in his Jan. 3 weekly radio address that he wanted to add \$12.6 billion to the Pentagon budget in fiscal year 2000 and \$112 billion over the next six years, staggering sums for a superpower without an enemy of any significance. Consider that the United States already spends more than \$260 billion a year on the military. This, as William Hartung of the World Policy Institute has noted, "is already twice as large as the combined budgets of every conceivable U.S. adversary, including major powers like China and Russia and regional 'rogue states' such as Iraq, North Korea and Libya."

But the beast must be fed—and it looks like the U.S. taxpayer is once again red meat for the military. Clinton's decision to shower the military with more money for planes, tanks, submarines and ballistic missile defenses—the biggest increase in Pentagon spending since the height of the Reagan arms build-up—was not a capricious one. The president stood firm for years against a significant rise in the military budget. But months of behind the scenes lobbying by hawks of all stripes led to his cave-in.

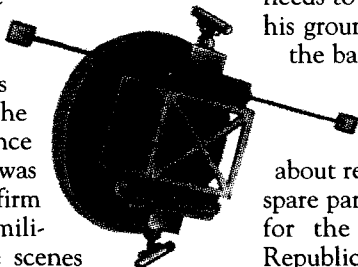
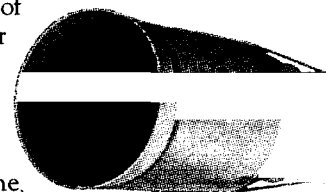
The end of the Cold War led to steady declines in military spending, although the Reagan-era



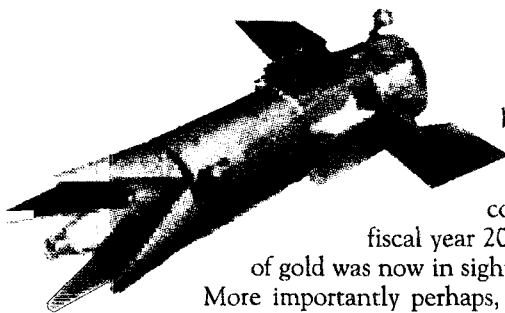
Pentagon glut meant that even after years of cuts the Pentagon budget was only down to the levels of the Carter administration by 1998. For most of the Clinton presidency the Pentagon budget was held in check by the specter of big budget deficits. In 1997, Republicans joined the administration in a balanced budget agreement that held military spending to increases less than the anticipated rate of inflation. But with budget deficits shrinking, Republican Secretary of Defense William Cohen, congressional Republicans and arms makers tired of the constraints of the post-Cold War world—a battle was brewing.

In June 1998, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott opened fire with a missile to the president bemoaning the weakened state of the military and stating that "more money needs to be allocated to our national defense." Clinton held his ground by reminding Lott that they needed to abide by the balanced-budget agreement. But the forces were gathering for an onslaught on the budget and the rallying cry was "readiness crisis"—the modern equivalent of "the British are coming!" Worries about readiness invoked dramas of troop shortfalls, a lack of spare parts, canceled military exercises and morale problems for the most powerful military force on the planet. Republican leaders in Congress held hearings and requested studies on the creaking military machine.

But, as of Aug. 26, Cohen remained unworried, telling the *Washington Times* that "the first to deploy forces are highly ready—and well trained." A few weeks later, the climate changed dramatically with the emergence of a \$70 billion







budget surplus, which meant the cap on Pentagon spending could be lifted for the fiscal year 2000 budget. The pot

of gold was now in sight.

More importantly perhaps, the power of the presidency was in serious disrepair. Clinton, of course, never has been embraced by the military, but his White House indiscretions widened the gap. On Sept. 12, the same day that Ken Starr's report was released to the public by the House Judiciary Committee, the Joint Chiefs of Staff met with Cohen to present their request for budget increases. Three days later, the Joint Chiefs made their demands to the president, and reports of the session noted that the Pentagon was pressing for a huge increase in funding. By January, they had Clinton's word on it. "Here we go again," says retired Navy Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll, deputy director of The Center for Defense Information (CDI). "The United States already spends substantially more for military forces

than any other nation, with no significant threats to our national security. We're engaged in an arms race with ourselves."

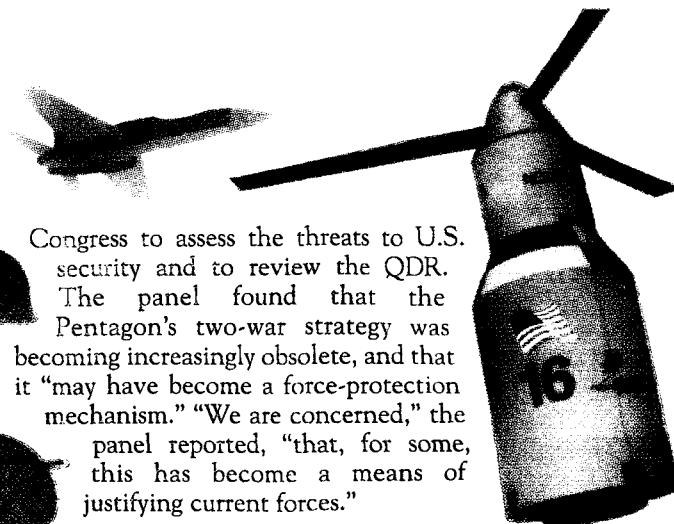
The demise of the Soviet Union left Pentagon hawks with a unique challenge. How do you raise the specter of doom without an enemy of distinction? Gen. Colin Powell admitted as much to Congress in 1991 when he testified, "I'm running out of demons. I'm down to Kim Il Sung and Castro."

But a new threat was on the way to save the military industrial complex. Its name was "uncertainty." It first surfaced in 1993, in the Defense Department's so-called "Bottom-Up Review," the first attempt to redefine U.S. military needs in the post-Cold War world. The review called for the United States to maintain a military force large enough to fight two Gulf War-size conflicts simultaneously. The Bottom-Up Review was followed by the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) in May 1997, which reaffirmed the "two major wars" requirement. "New threats and dangers, harder to define and more difficult to track, have gathered on the horizon," Cohen warned in the report. "We can never know with certainty when or where the next major theater of war will occur [or] who our next adversary will be."

The current call to spend \$112 billion more on the military over the next six years is grounded in being ready for "anything." It affirms the Pentagon's stated need to have it all—new weapons, major deployments around the globe and the ability to fight two major wars at the same time.

But the two-war strategy doesn't come cheap. The Project on Defense Alternatives, a Cambridge, Mass., think tank, has estimated the cost of a "second war capability" at \$50 billion a year.

That's not to say there haven't been dissenters within the establishment. In December 1997, the National Defense Panel, an independent group of national security experts was appointed by



Congress to assess the threats to U.S. security and to review the QDR.

The panel found that the Pentagon's two-war strategy was becoming increasingly obsolete, and that it "may have become a force-protection mechanism." "We are concerned," the panel reported, "that, for some, this has become a means of justifying current forces."

The Clinton administration is seeking to raise the Pentagon's weapons procurement budget by 50 percent over the next six years, pursuing a new generation of war-fighting systems under the rubric of replacing aging weapons. For example, the Navy would get a new attack submarine and the F/A-18E/F fighter, the Army would get the Comanche helicopter and the Air Force would get the F-22 tactical fighter.

Arms control advocates call for a different approach. Since U.S. weapons are already far superior to those of other nations, why not replace aging equipment with new purchases of current systems? The F-22 stealth aircraft is a case in point. The Air Force insists on it as a replacement for the F-15E fighter plane. The Council for a Livable World, a Washington-based research and advocacy organization, estimates that 341 F-22's will cost more than \$60 billion to design and build. Yet, the council notes, the General Accounting Office has written that the F-15E—which is already in the U.S. arsenal—will be the premier tactical aircraft in the world until at least 2010.

To be fair, the Pentagon is not solely to blame for wasting money on unneeded weapons. As Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) has noted, Congress voted to spend \$482 million in 1998 on seven C-130 cargo planes, even though the military ordered only one. In the last 20 years, according to Hartung of the World Policy Institute, the Air Force asked for five C-130s, but Congress ordered 256 new planes, a ratio of 50 planes purchased for every one requested. "Congress insists on keeping this Cold War establishment going and getting that money into the hands of defense contractors," says Carroll of CDI. "The huge profits the contractors make then come back to Congress in campaign contributions."

Indeed, the pork barrel politics even stretch into space. Stealing another chapter from the Republican playbook, the president has added \$6.6 billion to national missile defense programs over the next six years, bringing the total to \$10.5 billion between 1999 and 2005. Opponents of the program point out that since Reagan's "Star Wars" vision in 1983, the United States has spent more than \$60 billion on missile defense research—without producing a single usable weapon.

"Accounting for inflation, we've

spent three times more on missile defense than we spent on the Manhattan Project and the money has just vanished," says John Pike, a space weapons expert for the Federation of American Scientists.

Yet the added billions are hardly a sign that success is at hand or even on the horizon. While greasing the palms of military contractors like Boeing and Lockheed Martin, the Clinton administration has decided prudently that since no missile defense system exists, no decision to deploy will be made before 2000. Making it seem even more like fiction than science, critical components of the system won't even be tested until 2003.

There's a good reason missile defenses have been an illusive goal—the process is intrinsically daunting. Say some "rogue" state has launched a missile toward the United States. First, ground-based radar or satellite-based sensors must detect and track the incoming missile early enough for it to be intercepted. The defensive system must accurately peg a point of interception and launch a missile toward it.

Then a sensor on the defensive missile must detect the warhead far enough away to give it time to maneuver. Finally, the interceptor must be able to hit the warhead—a small object—

## THE ONLY THING THAT SEEMS CERTAIN IS THAT THE MISSILE DEFENSE PROGRAM WILL INTERCEPT AND DESTROY LARGE AMOUNTS OF TAXPAYERS' MONEY.

closing at a speed of 22,000 miles per hour. Pike points out that the \$60 billion in missile defense research has bought only 15 flight tests of a technology that is less sophisticated than what's needed for a national missile defense—and with that, only two of the tests were successful. Every test since 1992 has failed.

Yet missile defense advocates come armed with the powerful image of a nation like North Korea or a dictator like Saddam Hussein launching a missile at the U.S. mainland in the near future. "The threat is gravely exaggerated," Carroll says. "They talk about the Taepo Dong Missile that North Korea recently launched, but they don't bring up the fact that the third stage of the rocket test failed."

Pike adds that even if a nation had the ability to hit the United States, missile defense is still not the answer, because it won't work. What will? Old fashioned deterrence for one. "We could reduce their nation to a sea of radioactive glass," he says. "Dictators don't want to get vaporized. They have an instinct for survival."

One thing that missile defense might destroy, however, is

the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which may be abandoned in the current push to deploy a system. The Russians have made clear their concerns about the United States pursuing a missile defense system and have threatened to abandon efforts at nuclear arms reduction. For now, the only thing that seems certain is that the ballistic missile defense program will, as Pike says, "intercept and destroy large amounts of taxpayers' money."

With Congress and the president all caught up in sex, lies and audiotape, it's no wonder they haven't got the energy to monitor the military. The debate now going on in Washington is how much higher to raise the Pentagon budget above and beyond Clinton's request. The Pentagon wants \$36 billion in additional funds, and the Republicans are falling all over themselves to raise the dough.

The current fight is over how to spend projected budget surpluses. Clinton claims no social programs will be hit to pump up Pentagon spending. The administration's budget calls for devoting most of the surplus to Social Security and the bulk of the rest to fund increased military spending. Of course, if the surpluses don't materialize, Pentagon hawks may once again prey on social programs.

Will any political leader take on the Pentagon? Clinton has been in trouble with the military from his first days in office and now seems to be pursuing a policy of "don't ask, don't tell" when it comes to military needs. Shortly after the president's proposal to raise the Pentagon budget, Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) told the press, "If I could go back and change anything in time, I'd give President Clinton two years in the military so he wouldn't be so easily intimidated by the military chiefs."

The problem is not Clinton's alone. In a recent interview in *The National Journal*, Harvard Professor Michael Desch says that it isn't just the president who is uncomfortable dealing with the military culture. Pointing to potential Republican presidential candidates with no military

experience like George W. Bush, Lamar Alexander, John Kasich and Steve Forbes, he says, "Anyone who thinks that tension in civil-military relations is limited to the Clinton administration is whistling past the graveyard."

The sleeping giant in all of this is the American public. A CBS News poll on Jan. 19 asked respondents what issue was most important to them—47 percent chose Social Security and Medicare, 43 percent chose education, and only 9 percent chose foreign policy and military spending. With the economy in gear, budget priorities aren't on the radar screen. But if the economy hits a bump, the public just might question the need to spend more than \$1,000 a year on the military per every man, woman and child in the nation. ■

**Ira Shorr** worked in the peace and justice movement for 20 years and is a freelance political affairs writer in Washington.



# Talking Black

By Salim Muwakkil

## African-American radio's political promise

Last summer, Chicago was jolted by the horrific news that police had charged two boys—ages 7 and 9—in the murder of an 11-year-old girl named Ryan Harris. The arrests reinforced Chicago's reputation as a haven for prepubescent crime.

But some people weren't convinced. Evidence showed the victim was badly battered and sexually assaulted; how could two diminutive preteens be responsible for such damage? Much of this speculation and doubt was generated by WVON-AM 1450, the city's lone black-owned radio station. Callers to the talk radio station galvanized efforts to produce a legal team that aggressively challenged the charges. Additional investigation found semen on the victim, and the police dropped the charges against the boys.

The Harris murder was one of the most recent examples of WVON's influence on Chicago's black community and, by extension, the entire city. Although the tiny station is limited by just 1,000 watts of broadcast power, its impact is enormous. Ever since WVON played a major role in the 1983 election of Harold Washington, the city's first black mayor, politicians seeking black support have flocked to the station. Many of the city's most committed African-American activists are members of the station's unofficial "family" and regularly float ideas and strategies on the air (where I also serve occasionally as a substitute host). What's more, as in the Harris case, listeners to the station frequently launch civic actions that seize the initiative from the city's traditional black leadership.

Similar stories are told in other cities served by black-talk radio; occasionally national movements are initiated by the rambunctious medium. For example, in 1995 when the *San Jose Mercury News* published Gary Webb's "Dark Alliance" series alleging that the CIA cultivated connections to drug traffickers who, in turn, flooded black communities with crack cocaine, the subject exploded on black radio across the country. Although few mainstream news organizations seemed interested in the story, the outcry emanating from the black community forced government officials to respond to the charges. Former CIA director John Deutch met with the Congressional Black Caucus and vowed to initiate an internal investigation. Deutch later addressed a skeptical crowd at a town meeting in the crack-cocaine epicenter of South Central Los Angeles. "If it hadn't been for black talk radio, which has been the real drumbeat on this, the CIA-cocaine issue might have been lightly glossed over as it had been in the

past," said Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), the former CBC chairwoman who still heads a task force on the CIA issue, in 1996. Instead, it was put on the public agenda and remains a hot topic within black communities across the country.

This power to galvanize community action has upped the profile of black talk radio. Strangely though, there are few such stations. Since FM stations are best suited for music, radio's biggest profit booster, most talk is relegated to the AM dial. According to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's August 1998 survey, African-Americans currently own 100 of 4,724 commercial AM radio stations in the United States. Of that 100, just 14 offer some sort of talk format. There also are two or three white-owned stations that feature black talk.

In 1980, there were just 75 radio stations devoted to talk, but by 1998 there were more than 1,350, according to *Talkers Magazine*, an industry publication. For African-Americans this boom has had an ominous undertone. Many of the most popular hosts are rabid right-wingers with race-baiting agendas. Indeed, many analysts trace the rise of the populist right to the booming influence of talk radio. It was the national voice of those "angry white men"—like Rush Limbaugh and G. Gordon Liddy—who bumrushed Congress in 1994 and planted a GOP flag.

The rapid development of right-wing radio caught much of black America off-guard, but black talk shows were among the first to respond. "Much of that stuff is hate radio," says Joe Madison, program director for black-owned WOL-AM 1450 in Washington. "There's no question about it, those hate talk show hosts are agents of white supremacy and we are an antidote to their poisonous attempt to turn back the clock."

Black America has reacted to the rise of the angry white men with a mobilization of its own—and black talk radio has fueled that action. "Black radio played a crucial part in helping to mobilize and organize African-Americans for the Million Man March," said march coordinator Benjamin Muhammad (formerly Benjamin Chavis) in 1995. "We surveyed a random sample of 1,000 march participants, and one of the questions we asked was, 'How did you find out about the Million Man March?' Black radio ranked first or second."



A memorial to Ryan Harris, an 11-year-old girl slain in Chicago. Her case galvanized local black radio.

DANIEL LIPPIT/AFR

Still, only a handful of black-oriented stations offer talk shows. This is a curious gap, especially given black talk's proven potency. "I'm sorry to say it, but not enough of the community demands the kind of information a talk show is designed to provide," says Pluria Marshall Jr., president of the Marshall Media Group, which owns radio stations and newspapers in Texas and Indiana. "It may be politically incorrect to say this, but most black people are content with pure entertainment. If we changed our format to all talk, we'd lose a lot of our listeners. Let me be frank—our listeners would desert us like we had the plague."

Unfortunately, a broadcaster's degree of social impact doesn't show up on the bottom line. "We may be the most crusading station in the entire country," Marshall says. "But if we don't make some money, we're off the air. Your location and the scope of your audience are what will determine whether or not a talk format will succeed."

**T**he question of profitability poses a dilemma for those pushing talk formats. While talk radio is best served by controversy, advertisers are repelled by it. Even relatively successful (and decidedly noncontroversial) music-oriented black stations are given short shrift by advertisers, according to a Federal Communications Commission report released in January. "Those stations that serve minority communities are not getting their fair share of advertising dollars," reported FCC Chairman William Kennard in a statement accompanying the report's release.

For black talk radio, that problem is exacerbated by its often contentious fare. WVON, for example, is regularly criticized in mainstream venues for its aggressive response to perceived racial slights. In New York, WLIB-AM 1190 lost more than \$200,000 in radio ads in 1995 alone because of complaints of racism and anti-Semitism, station owner Pierre "Pepe" Sutton told *Emergence* magazine. Other black talk stations have weathered similar charges.

Most white Americans rarely hear black people talking candidly—and angrily—about racism. Deeply rooted traditions of racial protocol require African-Americans to suppress displays of anger or displeasure. Occasionally, the disparate realities of black and white Americans are revealed by a social trauma like the televised Rodney King beating, or the O.J. Simpson trial. But by and large, inter-racial empathy remains a rare quality in America. Black talk radio, like the genre in general, encourages candor and many black callers express their fury at racism's persistence.

But angry black people are not as attractive to advertisers as the angry whites who rocketed talk show ratings to new heights and made stars of talk show hosts. Even as they are becoming more effective, black talk stations are disappearing. From 1995 to 1998, 9 black-owned AM stations folded. Not only do new market dynamics demand more aggressive profit-seeking, but the 1996 Telecommunications Act facilitated a kind of market imperialism in which deep-pocketed corporations are gobbling up less-endowed stations at a feverish clip.

Political considerations are also a factor. "After the revolution, the first thing the revolutionaries seize is the communications apparatus," says Clifford Kelley, a popular host at WVON. "Communication is the key to virtually everything else. The old adage that knowledge is power is

## Pump Up the Volume

By Lawrence Soley

The Federal Communications Commission, the government agency that develops U.S. telecommunications policy, took a step toward legalizing microradio stations on January 28 by announcing that it will consider licensing low-watt FM stations. According to federal law, the FCC must invite public comments during a rulemaking phase, which precedes the adoption of new regulations.

The proposed FCC rule would create two new classes of stations—1,000-watt FM stations with a broadcasting radius of 8.8 miles and 100-watt stations with a broadcasting radius of 3.5 miles. The FCC is also seeking public comment on microstations that broadcast with 1 to 10 watts of power, and whether the new stations should be noncommercial.

The announcement followed a six-year battle that pitted the FCC and commercial radio broadcasters against community activists and unlicensed radio broadcasters. Between 1993 and 1998, hundreds of unlicensed, low-power stations took to the airwaves, providing small towns and big-city neighborhoods with community news, activist talk shows and alternative music, mostly drawn from independent record labels. The unlicensed radio movement was the outgrowth of "people's frustration with the garbage on commercial stations and the need for people to express themselves," says San Francisco attorney Luke Hiken, who represented Free Radio Berkeley and other unlicensed broadcasters in court fights with the FCC. "Microradio allowed people to speak in their own voices, and they soon saw operating a radio station as a right, not a privilege."

A year ago, it looked like the microradio revolt was facing defeat. Under pressure from the commercial broadcasting industry, the FCC launched an offensive beginning in the fall of 1997 against unlicensed broadcasters. By the end of that year, the FCC had silenced more than 100 low-power stations, including Boston's Radio Free Alston and Tampa's 87X (a.k.a. Radio Free Tampa Bay). At least as many stations were silenced during the first six months of 1998. Even more devastating to the free radio movement was Federal District Court Judge Claudia Wilken's decision on June 16, 1998 to issue a permanent injunction against Free Radio Berkeley, forcing that station, San Francisco Liberation Radio and other unlicensed California stations off the air.

Each time the FCC shut down a station there were protests. In Boston, elected officials bemoaned the closing of Radio Free Alston. In Tampa, 100 supporters of free radio demonstrated in front of the FCC office to protest the closing of 87X, Party Pirate 102.1 FM and Lutz Community Radio.

The combination of public pressure and personnel changes at the commission led to the steps toward legalization of low-watt radio. At the end of 1997, William Kennard was appointed as the new FCC chairman, and he was joined by others who were more concerned about public access. "The FCC took a two pronged approach," Hiken says. "It tried to placate [commercial broadcasters] by silencing the stations and at the same time had to respond to the outrage of the American public about the consolidation that had taken place in the industry." ■

**Lawrence Soley is the author of *Free Radio: Electronic Civil Disobedience (Westview)*. Comments about the proposed rules (MM Docket 99-225) can be sent to the FCC at 1919 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20554.**

exactly right, and a lot of people in America fear powerful black people."

**I**ronically, it's a small group of black conservative hosts who wield disproportionate power in mainstream American radio. Ken Hamblin, who bills himself as the "Black Avenger," is a Denver-based conservative noted for his acerbic opposition to

*Continued on page 21*



# Richard II

## How Daley does it

By David Moberg

**A**fter the riotous 1968 Democratic Convention, Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley parried protesters with one of his rhetorical zingers: "What trees do they plant?"

The mayor missed the point of war opponents but made perfect sense to his most loyal constituents. It seems that the thunderous words of the Old Man, who tried to conceal the city's slums from the eyes of convention delegates, stuck deep in the mind of his namesake son. In his first decade in office, Mayor Richard M. Daley has indulged in a paroxysm of planting, not only of trees but of flowers and shrubs in planter boxes, complemented by new streetlights, neighborhood signs, wrought-iron fences and paint jobs. It's a gloss that has pleased visitors and residents alike.

Even more important for Daley's political success, however, has been six years of especially strong Midwestern economic growth, which has pushed unemployment in Chicago below the national average, reduced crime and bolstered tax receipts. Most of that windfall has resulted from national economic trends, but Daley has brought stability and control that please business interests and promoted select initiatives

Cleveland or other deeply troubled older cities. And since the '80s, affluent singles and couples (some of them with children) have been rediscovering the advantages of urban living. Daley, who was first elected mayor 10 years ago, wanted more of them. They pay taxes; create, attract or retain businesses, especially restaurants and entertainment spots; and are less of a financial burden on government, though they do demand public order and good schools.

This ambition to recapture a missing middle class from the suburbs holds appeal across a wide swath of the political spectrum. Yet there are questions about what strategy works best. Can cities attract middle- and upper-middle-income residents without victimizing or displacing low-income people who already live there? And can strategies to make cities more livable for the middle class also reduce poverty and inequity, thus improving the lot of the poor?

**D**aley's success is no model of progressive urban policy. Like his Republican counterparts in New York and Los Angeles, Daley emphasizes fighting crime, restraining property taxes, privatizing services and adopting a corporate-style, business-friendly government. Developers have bankrolled Daley, who has tended to their needs, with, for example, a rapidly growing abundance of "tax increment financing" districts (TIFs) to direct tax revenue growth to serving downtown areas (shortchanging broad-based city services and the schools in the long-run). In 1997, Daley also became a leading ally of business efforts to block the Clinton administration's strengthening of clean air standards, and he tried to derail a "living wage" ordinance for city contract workers (a weak version passed when it became politically necessary to push through a pay increase for the mayor and the City Council.)

Daley is about as good a Republican mayor as a Democrat can be, but his electoral coalition does force him to accommodate various neighborhood and progressive pressures. Even at the risk of conflicts with police and fire unions, Daley has supported affirmative action. He has also adopted tolerant policies toward gays and measures to fight sexual discrimination on the job. In the wake of Mayor Harold Washington's reforms in the mid-'80s, services and physical improvements are more equitably distributed among neighborhoods, though the downtown is still heavily favored over the rest of the city. "Daley didn't inherit his father's city," political consultant Don Rose says. "There were positive changes under

[former Mayor] Jane Byrne and even more under Harold Washington, and he didn't turn the clock back."

Daley's "new machine" has the conventional developer money backing, but his political coalition consists of working-class "white ethnics," a large bloc of Latinos (more than 15 percent of the city population but a smaller proportion of voters) and the socially tolerant middle-class and affluent whites living mainly along the lakefront. Although Daley has not counted on votes of African-Americans (who comprise about 40 percent of the city population), he has increasingly domesticated the black community leadership through judicious support of many of their favored projects. Even though the mayor has appointed high-profile blacks in

STEVE ANDERSON/ITT



Daley's domesticated allies; non-competitor Rep. Bobby Rush (inset).

to bolster city life, especially higher educational standards. As a result, on Feb. 23 voters will almost certainly re-elect Daley in a landslide over U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush, a former Black Panther leader and South Side alderman.

It is easy to deride Daley's sprucing up as superficial, compared with the persistent deeper problems of the city. But making the city seem attractive and orderly is an important element of the mayor's strategy for persuading the middle class, especially whites, to live in the city. Daley's father, like most big city mayors, was frustrated by the flight of the white middle class to the suburbs in the postwar era, even though Chicago's central city never sank to the levels of Detroit,

government positions, many African-Americans still feel excluded from real power.

While corruption and scandal still fester around him, he has responded with three different ethics ordinances, as much to maintain appearances as to prevent corruption. Retirements, convictions and other departures have also given Daley the chance to appoint 40 percent of current members of the City Council, and there are few even moderately independent voices remaining. There is no coherent independent, progressive political movement remaining in the city, though the New Party—which has helped elect one alderman—is backing progressive candidates in four wards this year. Only two aldermen out of 50, however, have endorsed Rush, although his two fellow black congressmen, Reps. Danny Davis and Jesse Jackson Jr., do support him.

The first Mayor Daley also controlled all but a handful of aldermen and most black community leaders through the fabled machine and its patronage. But an independent political movement emerged in reaction to corruption, the abuse of centralized power and—especially in the black community—unequally distributed city services and police brutality. In reaction to the machine, Chicagoans also created a rich assortment of community organizations and local public interest groups, promoting causes from affordable housing to environmental protection. The conflict between “downtown” and “the neighborhoods” became a surrogate for the clash between the financial elite and the city’s working class. When Harold Washington was elected mayor in 1983, he moved to equalize services, invest public funds more heavily in all the neighborhoods and make community groups more active partners in city-wide problem solving. But Washington coalition of blacks, Latinos and liberal whites collapsed after his death in 1987.

When the younger Daley came to power two years later, he didn’t try to resurrect the old machine or reverse the moves toward equity. He inverted Washington’s coalition, linking lakefront whites, Latinos and ethnic whites, partly through his promise to improve Chicago schools. Although the old patronage system was dead, he found new forms of political payoffs, giving aldermen free reign over small deals in their wards in exchange for support on his big items. Daley also became adept at snuffing out potentially explosive political situations. Meanwhile, many of his black opponents adopted a more narrowly racial perspective than Washington had advanced, cutting them off from the coalition partners they needed.

Daley dispenses just enough in the way of modest initiatives to dampen political challenges. Four years ago, for example, he was embarrassed during his campaign by demands from the Coalition for the Homeless that the city include single-room occupancy buildings and other affordable housing in the new residential complexes south of the Loop, where Daley had moved. In January, just before this year’s

election, Daley announced plans for four new SROs around the city and made sure the coalition’s director attended the press conference. Daley also recently renewed city funding for support of community groups rehabilitating old buildings into affordable housing.

These were all welcome steps, if far short of what’s needed, since an estimated 130,000 poor people currently cannot find affordable housing, and the destruction of much public housing—under federal dictates but with Daley’s support—will put another 42,000 people in search of nonexistent affordable places to live. As more of Chicago housing becomes too expensive, many of the black poor are being pushed out of the city into extremely poor, black suburbs on the city’s southern edge, where there are few services or jobs and even less political clout for them than in the city. “Ultimately we’re just moving the problem instead of solving the problem,” remarks Coalition for the Homeless director John Donahue. It’s a neat inversion of the middle class suburban flight from problems of poverty decades ago.

Daley, rarely driven by principle or passion, is a clever political tactician. For example, he has astutely held down taxes and increased police before elections, then raised taxes and stabilized police afterward. But if Daley does have a passion, other than creating a beautiful city that is a world center for business, it is education. That is also politically clever, since it would be hard to attract middle-class homeowners or businesses without changing the reality—or image—of Chicago’s public schools. Education is also a high priority across all ethnic, class and racial lines.

Under 1995 state legislation, the mayor gained new power over public education, including tools to improve failing schools. But Daley’s appointees, who brought new stability to financial management, also began to recentralize educational policy control, one of the original causes of the system’s failure. While Daley’s school board poured much-needed money into refurbishing and expanding schools, it also imposed policies discredited by academic research and experience in other school systems, such as over-reliance on narrow test scores and the prohibition of “social promotion,” which President Clinton unwisely touted in his State of the Union address. While test scores have climbed, there are good reasons to doubt the long-term effectiveness of the mayor’s strategy (see “Chicago’s 4 R’s,” Sept. 20, 1998).

Daley’s shift to undercut the powers and responsibility of principals and local school councils reflects a pernicious pattern of bureaucratic centralism that undercuts the value of many of his most important initiatives. For example, under pressure from community groups, such as the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS), Daley introduced a community policing pilot project in 1993. Following initial success, the strategy was adopted throughout the city the next year, and CANS was retained to organize and train community residents to work with police in solving neighborhood problems. But Daley soon dropped CANS and put

## Daley’s success— privatizing services and favoring downtown over neighborhoods— is no model of progressive urban policy.



# Talking Black

Continued from page 18

the civil rights orthodoxy. His show often leads the pack in his time slot. Laurence Elder, a Los Angeles-based talk show host, provoked so much anger among African-Americans that several civil rights groups launched boycotts against his sponsors. Elder's show is among the most popular in the city.

Armstrong Williams, perhaps the most enterprising of this group of ideology entrepreneurs, issues his conservative ripostes right from the belly of the beast in Washington. His cloying presence at many seemingly distinguished events expose his value as a right-wing mascot. Whenever conservatives need to diffuse charges of racism for the biased effects of their policies, Williams is always available.

While these black conservatives may have widespread main-

stream appeal, they are busts on the black talk circuit. There are exceptions, of course. Tony Brown, a black commentator and author well known for his Republican affiliation, hosts a popular show on New York's WLIB. But, by and large, the most popular hosts push a kind of progressive black nationalism. While they place a premium on black entrepreneurship and racial pride, they tend to advocate left-leaning positions.

"I see talk radio as the daily version of the black newspaper," says Cathy Hughes, founder and chair of Radio One, the largest black-owned radio broadcasting company in the country. "Black talk radio is like that talking drum that evokes a response from all people of African descent. It's in our bones, our history, our culture."

WVON's Kelley agrees: "If we don't tell the black community what's going on, who will? It's not in anyone else's interest that we be well-informed." ■

## Richard II

Continued from page 20

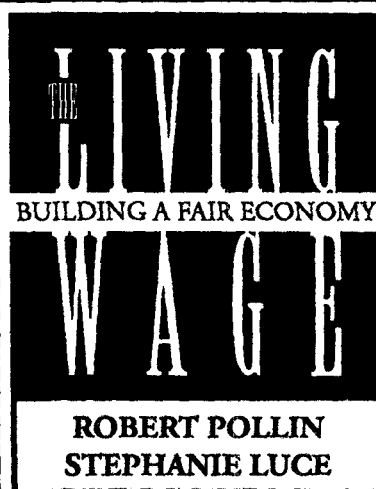
city employees in charge of training. Now relatively few neighborhoods fully implement the city's model for community involvement in public safety issues. At the same time, Daley pushed through an anti-loitering ordinance, which was used to arrest more than 40,000 young people over three years (see "Press Pass," Dec. 13, 1998). Although the Illinois Supreme Court overturned the law, the city has appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court.

His results have been as mixed as the policing strategies themselves. Crime statistics did not drop as steeply in Chicago in the early '90s as in other big cities. Chicago had more murders last year than New York, a city more than twice its size. But citizen complaints about police did increase more than in cities like San Diego, which more consistently employed community problem-solving strategies, though far less than in New York, whose tough-cop, statistics-driven version of community policing soon may be adopted in Chicago.

Ultimately, Daley's resistance to popular participation in government and his drive to control from the center—from economic development and policing to schools and environmental policy—limit his ability to solve the city's problems. Both poor and middle-class citizens want clean and safe streets and good schools. But poor people also need a chance to benefit from an improving city and to raise their own standards of living. The city can help reduce poverty and joblessness through better education of adult workers, support for higher wages—such as more effective living wage ordinances—and stronger advocacy for public transit and transit-related development projects. Equally important, by involving citizens, com-

munity organizations and advocacy groups, the city can mobilize thousands of individuals with innovative ideas and a wide-range of resources to solve urban problems. Just as the trees and flower pots boost morale, so would greater democracy and citizen participation generate social energy and a popular stake in the success of the city.

In the long run, Daley's aversion to a more vigorous democracy may be the seed of his own future political tribulations. But that won't happen this year. With a buoyant economy and a planter on every street corner, enough Chicagoans are content or optimistic that if this year's election were for "mayor for life," Daley might win that contest as well. ■



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# Black Britannia

By John Ghazvinian

In the mid-'90s, fashion arbiters began declaring that designers like John Galiano, Alexander McQueen and Vivienne Westwood had helped move Europe's center of gravity from Paris and Milan to London. Then, there were "upcoming" East End art scenes and innovative restaurants, and faint peeps of jingoistic glee could be detected in the coverage from Fleet Street. But it was not until *Newsweek's* splashy October 1996 cover asked, "Is London the Coolest City in the Universe?" that the press attention picked up a head of steam, and Londoners had a reason to read *Time Out* again. After all, now the Americans had noticed, so it had to be true.

The juggernaut picked up a predictable momentum as 1997 wore on,

## Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain

By Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips  
HarperCollins/Trafalgar Square  
422 pages, \$35

and by May 1, the youngest prime minister since William Pitt in 1783 took office, declaring a "New Britain." Suddenly the members of Oasis were received in Downing Street as the Pet Shop Boys played official Labour Party Gay Pride functions. "Call me Tony!" blared the headlines that week, as Blair announced that he wanted his cabinet meetings to be free of the traditional forms of address, "minister" and "prime minister." It was not long before the British Tourist Authority noticed the potential cash cow that *Newsweek* had unleashed. In the search for a new BTA slogan that would de-emphasize the country's imperial past, "Cool Britannia" was born.

Of course, there was little of substance to be found in the Fleet Street rodomontade. There always has been innovative work produced in Britain, with or without catchy slogans. And Brit cool is as old as the Carnaby Street



GETTY IMAGES, CRISPIN HUGHES/PHOTOFUSION

haze of the '60s. But what was encouraging about 1997 was that (as the pun on "Rule Britannia" suggests) imperial glory was now definitively uncool. Indeed, London's pavements always have creaked under the strain of hordes of trendy young Europeans arriving from Italy, France or Sweden. Only now they come on British Airways planes whose tail-fins no longer carry the Union Jack, but "ethnic" designs like Chinese calligraphy and faux African prints, meant to symbolize Britain's new role as a global culture cauldron. (A much downsized Iron Lady Thatcher is said to have spotted a plastic replica of one of the new planes at a conference and casually dropped her hanky over the tail fin).

The Great British Public, once treated to a steady diet of images of its own racial superiority, has learned that there is a thin line between propaganda and marketing, and is being sold not on greatness but hipness. One of New Labour's most commented-on projects since it came to power is the so-called "rebranding Britain" campaign, of which the BTA and British Airways were only the beginning. The campaign, engineered by advertising powerhouse BMP DDB, is aimed at selling a new image of British design and derring-do to the world. It has a strong multicultural element. In fact, much of what has been called "cool" of late is the result of new sensibilities about race, and so

much more is waiting in the wings (drum 'n' bass artist Roni Size, for instance, or London's tabla-driven "Asian underground," which undoubtedly will be the "next big thing" in electronic music).

In 1999, as the hype peels away, books like Mike and Trevor Phillips' *Windrush* stand as powerful monuments to just how far Britain has come. The Phillips brothers do so much more than trace the history of British race relations since the arrival in 1948 of the *Empire Windrush* (the boat which brought the first 430 post-colonial

**Blair's "rebranding" campaign to market the U.K. has a strong multicultural element.**

Commonwealth immigrants to the U.K.); they also celebrate the immense contributions that Caribbean immigrants have made to British popular culture. After decades of underground energy and musical, literary and artistic production, black and Asian Britons finally feel like they are not going to be beaten walking down the street. They actually have time to publicize their own work—and Britain is that much better for it.



The strength of *Windrush* is that it mourns the pain of the early pioneers as successfully as it celebrates the achievements of the new generation. An example is the Phillips' treatment of Notting Hill, which recently has become one the most desirable addresses in London, but whose very name was for years in Britain a synonym for racial conflict. Foiled upon initial arrival by "No Coloureds" signs in other parts of London, the first wave of immigrants in the '50s were forced to accept Notting Hill's tenement flats at inflated rates.

In a sort of weird reverse gentrification, white residents gradually were priced out of existence, as the neighborhood turned into a tense ghetto, eventually becoming the scene of historic race riots in 1958. It was only after this that some blacks realized they could seek redress of their housing woes before rent control boards, and, as the area became affordable again, radical activists and assorted bohemians began moving in. The scars of the Notting Hill riots ironically lent the area a sort of radical chic, an image which persists to this day.

The Phillips brothers deliver a delicious intermarriage of high and low narrative, making the book as informative for middle England (and middle America) as it is essential for the kids on Haringey's council houses. *Windrush* is the companion volume to last year's major BBC documentary series, and is structured around dozens of interviews of early immigrants. Everyone is there who should be—from MPs to auto mechanics, from R&B performer Jazzy B. to Calypso singers of middling fame, from community activists to *New Left Review* founder Stuart Hall. The stories range from amusing, sad or ironic to the truly unforgettable.

Some of the best moments come out of the immigrants' first arrival into England. Cold weather wreaked instant havoc on their resolve. The endless lines of Victorian row houses, each with a billowing chimney, made many think that there was a lot of work in England—in the Caribbean sun, a chimney had only ever meant a factory. And just as most English people had never seen in the flesh the black men they read about in colonial adventure books, most West Indians had never seen poor white people before. Raised

on the myths of white superiority and a bountiful mother country, they were horrified by what they found in the grim neighborhoods of postwar Britain:

I'd been a colonial all my life here, in Jamaica ... and you're used to seeing the white man boss. When you go to England ... when you find an Englishman that can't read and write, you know, it shakes you. ... I remember we landed in Scotland, and while on the train several things struck me, the first time I see white children poorly clothed. And when we stop along the siding, will be asking us for cigarettes and nylons, and that sort of thing. To see a white child begging from us, it was something I'd never dreamed of.

Though the interviews inevitably steal the show, the authors' commentary is far more than mood lighting. The graceful introduction—a sturdy mesh of personal reflection and historical analysis—should be required reading for anyone whose parents came from somewhere else. But the authors are at their most stimulating when they meld the mundane with the monumental, allowing the traditional political narrative to dovetail with the immigrants' experiences. They perform this task with exquisite judgement. Just when you think you have read about World War II from every angle, you are treated to several stunning anecdotes surrounding the conflicts that arose when white American servicemen in England kept trying to impose segregation on the British troops, whose num-

bers included some West Indians.

While *Windrush*'s flaws are few, there is one that nags. The use of the word "multi-racial" in the title of a book that deals only in black and white is particularly disheartening to those of us British Asians—Indians, Pakistanis, Bengalis, Arabs, etc.—who grew up believing (and still believe) that we were part of the same struggle. It seems to imply that we were merely a side act, that we are part of "multi-racial Britain," but were not part of the "irresistible rise." It would be petty to lord this complaint excessively over an otherwise excellent book, but the point has to be made.

Still, *Windrush* is one of those books that has an arresting tendency to incite historical reflections and comparisons. It is fascinating, for instance, to see just how much the black power movement in London in the '60s was inspired by America's struggle. One of the most moving passages of the book is when Mike

Oozewald, black silkscreen on metal, by Cady Nolan. From **Unfinished History**, on exhibit at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art through April 4. The show features the work of 23 artists addressing unresolved controversies and conflicts of the 20th century.



Phillips talks about wanting to reach out and touch Stokeley Carmichael's face when he saw it on TV. It is sad to read this and think that America's media now offer the world a different set of images, producing an idea of "cool" that draws on the post-imperial machismo of CNN's "Showdown with Iraq," trotting out over-produced reassurances of Bruce Willis' tumescence like *Armageddon*.

Fortunately, British popular culture seems to have taken an opposite trajectory. During the heyday of the British Empire, if anything "cool" was happen-

ing in Britain, it was not the business of the BBC, and even less the business of the government. How different things are today. In an almost embarrassing display of white liberal overcompensation, the BBC declared the second half of 1998 to be "Windrush season," scheduling not just the "landmark" series, but six months of events and programs across the country.

None of this is to say that the fetishizing of "ethnic" art should be mistaken for progress. But one should be grateful for change when it happens. Gone from the BBC are the chipped-glass accents

of Oxford-educated reporters; gone is the crackling black-and-white newsreel footage of triumphant elephants parading Lord Mountbatten past swarthy savages. In its place, the Beeb, and now Mike and Trevor Phillips, have calmly cut through the excess hype of Cool Britannia, delivering some well-thought-out material on the cultural contributions of ethnic minorities since the collapse of Empire. ■

John Ghazvinian held the Murdoch Scholarship at The Sunday Times of London in 1997. He lives in New York.

# Speak, Memory

By Summi Kaipa

Ever since Adrienne Rich was anointed by W.H. Auden with the Yale Younger Poets Prize in 1951, the controversial lesbian poet, scholar and political activist has gone on to write many important volumes of poetry, such as *Diving into the Wreck* and *An Atlas of a Difficult World*, winning a slew

## Midnight Salvage:

Poems 1995-1998

By Adrienne Rich

W.W. Norton

75 pages, \$22

of coveted honors, from the National Book Award to the MacArthur Fellowship. And Rich made headlines in 1997 for declining to add to her list of citations another prize, the National Medal of the Arts—a presidential honor—on the grounds that the Clinton Administration had not done enough to save public funding of the arts. "There is no simple formula for the relationship of art to justice," Rich wrote in her letter of refusal. "But I do know that art—in my own case the art of poetry—means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of power which holds it hostage."

It is precisely this "relationship of art to justice" that Rich consistently contends with in her writing. At the outset, her latest work, *Midnight Salvage*, begins with an epigraph by George Oppen,

whose poetry also inquired deeply into ethics. This overture marks the book as an important continuation of Rich's emotional and philosophical work. The primary question Rich raises in *Midnight Salvage* is her kinship with history and politics, a phenomenon she has returned to again and again in her work. In an earlier poem, "Tear Gas" (from 1984's *The Fact of a Doorframe*), she contemplates change—finding history and the world within her own body:

The will to change begins in my body  
not in the mind

My politics is in my body, accruing and  
expanding with every  
act of resistance and each of my  
failures

Locked in the closet at 4 years old I beat  
the wall with my body  
that act is in me still

In *Midnight Salvage*, Rich sustains this meditation on herself as a woman and poet in a world confronted by the pull of history wooing us into forgetfulness about the changes, promises and contracts we've made:

to look through history's bloodshot eyes  
into this commerce this dreadnought  
wreck cut loose  
from all vows, oaths, patents,  
compacts, promises : :  
To see

"To see" arrives in a line by itself, underneath two colons which replicate two sets of eyes, a new gesture in Rich's poetry suggesting awareness. Rich invites us "to see," to recognize our deeds over this century: usurping the civil rights of already disenfranchised people and undermining the importance of the arts as a social force. If we "see" our lost promises to ourselves and to one another, we confront our misdeeds. The alternative, she warns, is to be susceptible to the erasure of injustice alongside history's "bloodshot eyes" where we all could become "misaid, disinvented/undocumented, unverified":

Wherever you had to connect:  
question of passport, glances, bag

dumped late on the emptied carousel  
departure zones

where all could become misaid,  
disinvented  
undocumented, unverified

all but the footprint of your soul  
in the cool neutral air

In its quest for an appropriate or meaningful vision of history, *Midnight Salvage* transcends the narrative structures that characterize much of Rich's earlier work. The two longest poems in the book, the title poem and "A Long Conversation" are less linear and story-like. These intensely contemplative pieces are rooted in collage instances that force the reader to contend with a multifarious and often solemn subject matter. The title poem



ranges from questioning pedagogy—

Could not play by the rules  
in that palmy place : : nor stand  
at lectern professing  
anything at all  
in their hire

—to an image of a girl being forced  
into prostitution by her father:

pushing his daughter in her famine  
waisted flamingo gown  
out on the dance floor with the  
traffickers  
in nerve gas saying to them Go for it  
and to the girl Get with it

These verses alongside one another highlight the tension and movement between the numbered sections of the poem, yielding a work that does not reconcile itself, but pushes beyond reconciliation to the exposure of problems in the world. "Midnight Salvage," not driven by a very tangible narrative structure, relies on emotion to carry the poem forward. Its images, such as "black irises" in a "bedside

**Reading Rich, we must grapple with the responsibility of being part of a world that is often apathetic and ruthless.**

pitcher," are tonally rich and dark. The emotional weight of the images builds a context in which the narrator of the poem must grapple with the ethical responsibility of being part of a world—part of a history—that is often apathetic and ruthless. For Rich, such responsibility to confront history entails a "horrible patience," waiting for a social consciousness to incubate and to be addressed.

Coupled with political history are Rich's meditations on herself as an artist struggling to understand the relationship between personal expression and social change. In "A Long Conversation," the parts, not separated by asterisks or numbers, are constructed out of various



ROBERT GIARD

insisting on confronting "the conversation" about poetry and politics in order to effect change. In her refusal of the National Medal of the Arts, she wrote, "Anyone familiar with my work from the early Sixties on knows that I believe in art's social presence—as breaker of official silences, a voice for those whose voices are disregarded, and as a human birthright. ... My concern for my country is inextricable from my concerns as an artist."

At the center of Rich's manifesto is her apparatus of change, language, which drives what we think, the way we think it and what we intend. In Rich's equation, poetry as a contemplation on language is crucial to politics:

Now someone gets up and leaves,  
cloud-faced—I can't stand that  
kind of language. I still care about  
poetry.

*Midnight Salvage* is different from Rich's earlier books in its approach to language and narrative, but it resides as another earnest and thought-provoking book in the body of her work, which spans almost 50 years. This book, as does all of Rich's work, creates a significant lineage for Rich, both as a poet and as a lesbian, in which she is allowed to ask important questions about civil rights and free expression. Challenging democracy and politics, Rich extends her pursuit of writing and philosophizing to keep from being erased from the history books:

In the dark windowglass  
a blurred face  
—is it still mine?

Who out there hoped to change me—  
what out there has tried?

What sways and presses against the pane  
what can't I see beyond or through—

charred, crumpled, ever-changing human  
language  
is that still you?

Summi Kaipa is an MFA candidate at the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

"conversations"—both personal and poetic, which meld into one another as a coherent poem:

1799, Coleridge to Wordsworth: I wish  
you would write a poem  
addressed to those who, in consequence  
of the complete failure of the  
French Revolution  
have thrown up all hopes  
of the amelioration of mankind  
and are sinking into an almost  
epicurean  
selfishness, disguising the same  
under the soft titles of domestic  
attachment  
and contempt for visionary  
philosophies

By quoting Coleridge's words and presenting them as verse, Rich draws attention to the poetic medium as a means of resistance, suggesting that Coleridge was imploring Wordsworth for a political poem while, in doing so, he was in fact writing one. Adjacent to this conversation, Rich inserts a quote by Richard Nixon that attacks the arts and Jews, illustrating that the popular conversation about poetry, and about history, is too often thoughtless and narrow-minded:

... the Arts, you know—they're Jews,  
they're left-wing,  
in other words, stay away ...

But Rich does not "stay away," instead

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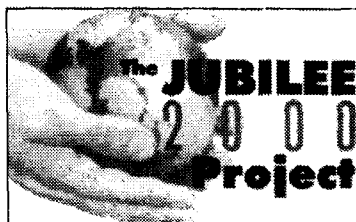
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*Continued on next page*

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Continued from page 30

To him, black means authentic. It means original. It means the source of so much great American music, from gospel to the blues to the "jump" music that prefigured rock 'n' roll. White, by contrast, means impostor, imitator, hijacker. Or at most, an inferior musician gamely trying to keep pace with the real deal.

But this distinction ultimately founders because it is based on a parochial definition of jazz as a music that must swing. Not so. Swing is one style of jazz, but not the only one. What about the dense, atonal piano of Cecil Taylor, a black titan? Or Duke Ellington's—or, for that matter, Marsalis'—excursions into classical suites? Or the lush ballads of Bill Evans? Can Evans, a white pianist who influenced a generation of white and black keyboard players, really be evicted from the jazz Hall of Fame simply because he doesn't swing like Count Basie?

Given the history of exploitation of black musicians in America, it is difficult even to raise the question of whether whites are somehow being denied their due because of racial politics. Writing recently in the *New York Times*, Richard M. Sudhalter, a trumpeter and jazz historian, risked ridicule by both asking and answering this bold question. He flatly asserted that, from the origins of jazz early this century to the end of World War II, leading black musicians learned much from white jazz musicians—perhaps as much as whites learned from blacks. Reacting to pointed claims of black superiority by Marsalis and friends, Sudhalter justifiably seeks some measure of dignity for seminal white musicians such as trombonist Jack Teagarden, clarinetist Pee Wee Russell and tenor saxophonist Bud Freeman. But Sudhalter ultimately is undone by trying too hard. Attempting to apportion racial credit more evenly, he badly overstates his case.

Sudhalter needs to listen more carefully to jazz recordings prior to 1945. They make abundantly clear that only a handful of white musicians made signal contributions to the music before World War II: After Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, Frank Trumbauer and vibist Red Norvo, the list gets pretty thin. As for white vocalists, only Sinatra's influence looms large. Sudhalter, though, makes the absurd claim that the obscure white singers Mildred Bailey and Connee Boswell were "easy peers" of black vocal icon Billie Holiday.

Then there's his misreading of statements made by black musicians themselves. He makes much of the tendency of Louis Armstrong, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins and other pivotal black figures to cite white peers as their equals or as sources of influence. It is true that Armstrong famously hailed the white Bunny Berigan as his favorite trumpeter, while black bandleader Lionel Hampton called white Dave Tough "the most imaginative drummer" in jazz history. Tenor sax giant Hawkins said the white Casa Loma band could give black bands lessons in ensemble teamwork.

Yet while black musicians undoubtedly drew on classical traditions and even imitated white jazz players to a some

degree, it's absurd to endow comments by Armstrong and others with terribly special significance. After all, until the '60s, with perhaps the lonely exceptions of Paul Robeson and Nat "King" Cole, black entertainers of all stripes did all they could to ingratiate themselves to white society. Armstrong may have loved Berigan's playing, but he also knew enough about prevailing racial politics to realize that when a black outperformed a white it wasn't polite to rub his nose in it.

In making a case for the equality of white musicians, Sudhalter would have done better to examine contemporary or '50s jazz. Today, whites consistently rank among the top jazz musicians, from pianist Michel Petrucciani, who died on Jan. 6, to trumpet star Tom Harrell and virtuoso tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano. The current crop of white jazzmen are nearly as impressive as the white stars of the '50s, now seen as a "golden" age of jazz because Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman were in their most dynamic, formative years. Nearly as important were the achievements of such white musicians as Gerry Mulligan, Chet

Baker, Stan Getz and bandleader Gil Evans. In their "cool" approach, Mulligan et al. influenced the aesthetic of black peers—notably Miles—and brought sophistication to a black-dominated bebop that often seemed too frenetic. To be sure, though, none of these white musicians spawned the legions of imitators who routinely pay homage to Monk, Mingus, Davis and Coltrane. Whatever their successes, they failed to undeniably change the course of jazz, only playing the music exceedingly well.

This may seem like a concession to Marsalis and other black supremacists who view jazz as an African-American preserve. That is not my intention. Marsalis is right that race offers clues about musical expression. It is even worth noting a musician's race, as I often do, to gain a fix on his sound and sensibility. But to say this is to state the obvious. Race does matter. But it does not matter so much that we must endorse a color line in jazz. It does not matter so much that we should accept the silly notion that whites can't swing. Besides, it isn't so easy to pin down jazz. The music is too protean, too prone to outside influences—whether African, Brazilian, Cuban or even European—to submit to a simple definition.

As jazz settles into another boom period, one which may yet rival the '30s and the '50s in popularity and cultural significance, the battle to win credit for its ascendancy is bound to intensify. Black demands for "ownership" of jazz may well grow more insistent, but these claims should be tempered by an awareness of what is. Yes, jazz is African-American at its core, but much of its appeal lies in its capacity for reinvention. Musicians of all colors can absorb, reinterpret and ultimately transform this marvelous music. Perhaps it was once true that, to paraphrase Ellington, "it don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing." No longer. ■

G. Pascal Zachary writes about jazz for the *Web* magazine *Addicted To Noise* and contributes regularly to *In These Times*.

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SUBMIT TO A  
SIMPLE DEFINITION.

# MY VISIONS OF

By G. Pascal Zachary

## As a jazz fan, I've got a confession to make: Race matters.

It matters a lot. So much so that I can't approach jazz in a color-blind way. Race consciousness influences my "ears," the way I listen to jazz, and to whom I listen. When I attend a club date—at the Iridium in New York, Yoshi's in Oakland or Ronnie Scott's in London—I consider the skin color of the musicians. When I decide whether to purchase a jazz CD, I look over the lineup of musicians and, sooner or later, I ask a simple, brutal question: Are there enough blacks?

I do not work for the Equal Opportunity Commission, and race certainly isn't my only criteria for evaluating the many hundreds of worthy jazz musicians—most black, some white—actively performing and recording. But I can't ignore the way racial background and identification shape the sensibility of an artist, and perhaps even define him or her in unconscious ways.

I do not mean to say that whites play one kind of jazz and blacks another, only that whites often have played a tamer, less rhythmically, more classical- or pop-influenced jazz. This is not my kind of jazz, for the most part. Of course, exceptions abound. Consider John Lewis, the pianist and backbone of the classically oriented Modern Jazz Quartet, or Art Pepper, a fiery, swinging alto saxophonist of extraordinary improvisational flair. That Lewis is black and Pepper white suggests that the best musicians render race irrelevant.



Left to right:  
Stan Getz,  
Wynton Marsalis,  
Joshua Redman,  
Thelonious Monk,  
Louis Armstrong,  
John Coltrane,  
Charles Mingus,  
Miles Davis,  
Ornette Coleman,  
Charlie Parker,  
Lester Young  
& Dizzy Gillespie

Saying that great jazz transcends race hardly ends this debate, though. Race remains a central problem for jazz as for American society as a whole. It remains a problem for those making jazz as well as those listening to it. Part of the reason why lies with history. During the first 60 years of this century, African-Americans rarely gained the recognition or compensation they deserved from their artistic achievements, while whites often reaped a whirlwind of profits from adapting and imitating African-American musical styles. The immense effect that Elvis Presley had on American youth in the '50s obscured his debt to black rhythm-and-blues artists, while highlighting the importance of whiteness as a crucial ingredient in entertainment success. While jazz spawned no stars, white or black, on the scale of a Presley, the ponderous pianist Dave Brubeck scored the biggest commercial successes in the same decade largely because his skin was the right color.

But at least Brubeck played jazz. Kenny G, the wildly popular white saxophonist, doesn't. Neither does Candy Dulfer, another "smooth" jazz saxist, whose good looks and suggestive attire make her seem like a refugee from the modeling business. Nor does ex-Blondie star Debbie Harry, now lead singer of the inaptly named Jazz Passengers, sing jazz. That all three are white reinforces the suspicion that whites play "phony" jazz for whites who can't tell the difference.

There is some truth to this suspicion and, indeed, to the racial stereotyping that permeates the jazz scene. To someone as august as Wynton Marsalis, the trumpeter and Pulitzer-Prize winning jazz composer, the racial lines are clear.

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